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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000566

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION -- Kuwait Parliamentary Elections

SUMMARY

Monday, May 19, 2008

¶1. Summary: As expected, the front page headlines of all Kuwaiti dailies covered the success of Islamist candidates in the Saturday, May 17 Kuwaiti Parliamentary elections. All newspapers also addressed the fact that no female candidates were elected to Parliament. Additionally, almost all of the Kuwaiti dailies printed editorials and op-eds analyzing the election results. Several of the editorials below expressed sympathy for the female candidates. Other articles listed the challenges that the Government of Kuwait might face if it chooses to follow a reformist "path of real development," a platform claimed by almost all the candidates. Several columnists characterized the election results as hopeless, also describing the results as a crisis of "mentality, culture, and lack of awareness." End summary.

¶2. Block Quotes:

-- Alam Al-Yawm published an editorial carrying the headline "Congrats to all; (welcome) to a Bright Present and Future." In this article, conservative Islamist Dr. Bassam Al-Shati advised the future Parliamentarians (05/19): "We are hopeful that the righteous and committed Parliament members will be able to work out an agenda that will serve the interest of those who elected them. Those who elected you are anticipating Islamist projects and to see the country move forward in every way. If you are offered a ministerial position, do not turn it down. Be the servants of the people, and do not open the closed doors that were the causes of political crises in the past."

--In the progressive moderate English daily, Kuwait Times, columnist Badrya Darwish, wrote a front-page editorial entitled, "Conspiracy Theories: Our Own Worst Enemies." She writes, "I cannot express how angry I am with women in Kuwait. We spent decades fighting, lobbying, screaming our heads off, building support among all organizations all over the world to take our political rights...We mentioned it on every occasion, whether said or happy or social political...And once we got it, what did we do with it? Nothing. It was all hypocrisy, that we wanted our rights. Sheer hypocrisy. In the last elections, we justified the failure of a woman to win even one seat in Parliament by saying never mind, no experience. Lack of experience, lack of courage, and lack of time to build a support base. But the second time, excuse me, this is not justifiable at all. It reflects the deep internal thinking of women in Kuwait. The number of women who voted is in the thousands; sixty percent of female voters turned out for the vote. They outnumbered men. And to whom did they give their voice? Only to men."

-- Under the headline "That is Us," Abdul Latif Al-Doueij, a columnist at the moderate Arabic language daily Al-Qabas, opined

(05/19): "what counts eventually is the people's will and choice. We need time and we need effort to get rid of the negative traces left by the 25-constituency regime. We have to say that the mission of the upcoming government will be difficult especially if it chooses to follow the 'path of real development.' It certainly has great potential since it still has the right to deal with all the public property (GDP). It does not have to collect it through taxes, as other governments do. It is in fact the only owner and producer; it has all the chances to direct the people. It only has to be decisive and ready to go." Another columnist in the same newspaper, Hassan Al-Issa wrote (05/19): "nothing is new under the strong sun of Kuwait except some supplementary political dust that is strangling freedom. Even though the Islamic Constitutional Movement members of Parliament lost the elections, the rest of the Islamists' groups have won. Therefore, I am looking for the hope that we were supposed to get out of the five-constituency regime but I have found nothing. The crises are not about constituencies, they are about mentality, culture and lack of awareness."

-- A front page editorial by Chief Editor Mohammad Al-Rumeihi in the recently-founded moderate Arabic language daily, Awan, carried the headline "The Number Changes But Not the Society." The Chief Editor wrote (05/19): "it is early to judge the new Parliament, yet we are sure it is more youthful and educated than its predecessor. Our society is today more educated and this will definitely lead us to better political actions. The results actually reveal some lessons.

The first lesson is that it is now time to talk about a minimum quota for women in each constituency. We should think of establishing a Ministry of Political Development to increase political awareness, as well."

-- In his daily column in the political Arabic daily Alam Al-Yawm,
KUWAIT 00000566 002 OF 002

entitled "Arigato Hadas," liberal writer Mishari Al-Adwani wrote (05/19): "The biggest loser is 'Hadas' or the 'Constitutional Islamic Movement, or Muslim Brotherhood.' We expected this outcome a year ago, and now it has been confirmed. In one day, Hadas lost what it has been building for years. It has become the weakest bloc in the National Assembly. What happened to Hadas can happen to any bloc or coalition. The Kuwaiti elector is mature and Kuwait's press has become very informative, unlike the days of the five newspapers.

The internet and its online forums have helped in disclosing all the mistakes and wrong doings of candidates. I just want to say to Hadas: 'Arigato,' which means thank you in Japanese."

-- Under the headline, "Our Truth," liberal columnist Saleh Al-Shayji editorialized in the pro-government Arabic daily Al-Anbaa (05/19): "Whether we have five, ten, fifteen or twenty five electoral districts our democracy will not be cured from its terminal illness. The social fabric of the Kuwaiti society will only produce an outcome like the one we had yesterday. This kind of a result will not help the country's reform, but it may well be a cause of its deterioration. This outcome will not put us ahead -- not even one step. To the contrary, the result of yesterday's elections is an assurance of a dim future that promises many political crises. Those who were elected to the National Assembly through primary elections will not be forgiving towards the government. They will begin their campaigns of vengeance. They had believed that the government was against them during the elections, and now it's time for revenge. With the lack of supportive laws, the government will remain weak and helpless. One way to appease the Islamists is to grant them ministerial seats. This way the pre-election enemy becomes tomorrow's friend."

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